

158.



IMPRIMATUR hic Liber
(cui Titulus , *A Letter to*
DEIST.)

Feb. 8.
1676.

Guil. Jane, R. P. D. Herra
Episc. Lond. a Sacra
Domest.



Ms. Paris. B. 1. 1. 1.
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A
LETTER
TO A
DEIST,

In Answer to several
OBJECTIONS
AGAINST THE
TRUTH and AUTHORITY
OF THE
Scriptures.

By *Edward Stillingfleet*, D. D. Dean of
St. Paul's Church, and Chaplain in
Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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LETTER

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THE PREFACE.

THis following Discourse was
Written for the satisfaction
of a particular Person, who
denied the Being and Providence of
God, but expressed a mean Esteem of
the Scriptures, and the Christian
Religion. Which is become so com-
mon a Theme among the Scepticks
of this Age, that the Author of this
Discourse thought it worth his time and
trouble, to consider the force of the Ob-
jections that were made against them.
Specially, being written in a grave and
serious manner, and not with that
satire and Buffonry, which the
Persons of this Age commonly be-
have upon Religion. It might be
A 3 justly

The Preface.

justly expected from such who pretend to Breeding and Civility, that they would at least shew more respect to that thing, which hath prevailed so much among Men of the best Understanding and Education, and who have had an Interest to carry on by it. For it is against the ordinary Rules of Conversation, to affront that which others think they have great Reason to esteem and love; and they would not endure the scorn and contempt of their meaner Servant, which they too often shew towards Religion, and the things belonging to it. If they are not in earnest when they scoff and mock at sacred things, their own consciences will tell them it is a horrible impiety; if they are in earnest, let them debate these things calmly and seriously, and let the stronger Reason prevail. Men may speak sharply and wittily against the clearest things in the World, as the Sceptics

The Preface.

of old did against all Certainty of Sense and Reason; but we should think that Man out of his senses, that would now dispute the Being of the Sun, or the Colour of the Snow. We do not say, the Matters of Religion are capable of the same evidence with that of Sense; but it is a great part of judgment and understanding, to know the proportion and fitness of evidence to the Nature of the thing to be proved. They would not have the Eye to judge of tastes, nor the Nose of Metaphysics; and yet these would be as proper as to have the senses judge of Immaterial Beings. If we do not give as good Reason for the Principles of our Religion, as the nature of Religion considered, can be given for it, let us then be blamed for our weakness in defending it; but let not Religion suffer, till they are sure nothing more can be said for it.

There.

The Preface.

*Tractat. Theol.
politic.*

There is a late Author, I hear is mightily in vogue among many, who cry up any thing on the Atheistical side, though never so weak and trifling. It were no difficult task to lay open the false Reasonings, and inconsistent Hypotheses of his Book; which hath been sufficiently done already in that Language wherein it was written. But if for the Advancement of Irreligion among us, that Book be, as it is talked, Translated into our Tongue, there will not, I hope, want those who will be as ready to defend Religion and Morality, as others are to decry and despise them.

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*A Letter of Resolution to a
Person unsatisfied about
the Truth and Authority
of the Scriptures.*

S I R,



Lthough I do not pretend to any skill in the *depths of Theology*, yet I am heartily concerned for the *Truth and Honour of the Christian Religion*; which it is the design of your papers to undermine. When I first looked them over, I could not think them so considerable as to deserve a particular Answer; especially, from one in my circumstances, who have so much

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Objections against the Authority

other business lying upon me, and
so little leisure and health to per
form it; but I found at the con
clusion of your Papers, so earnest
and vehement a desire expresse
by you, that I would return a
Answer, in order to the settle
ment of your mind, that I coul
not refuse an Office of so great
Charity, as you represent it to be
I confess, when I considered the
nature of your Objections, and
the manner of managing them
I could hardly believe that the
proceeded from a doubtful Mind
that was desirous of any satisf
faction; but since you tell me
I will first shew my Charity in be
lieving it, and then in endeavour
ring to give you my poor asst
stance, and impartial advice, in or
der to your satisfaction. And tho
truth, I think impartial advice will

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of the Scriptures Answered.

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contribute more to that end, than
spending Time and Paper in run-
ning through all the difficulties,
which it is possible for a cavilling
Mind to raise against the plainest
Truths in the World. For there
is nothing so clear and evident,
but a *Sophistical Wit* will always
find something to say against it;
and if you be the *Person* I take
you for, you very well know,
that there have been some, who
wanted neither Wit, nor Elo-
quence, who have gone about to
prove, *That there was Nothing in*
the World; and that if there were
any thing, it could not be understood
by Men; that if it were understood
by one Man, it could not be expressed
to another: And besides such ex-
travagant undertakers as these,
how many have there been, who
with plausible and subtle Argu-
ments,

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ments, have endeavoured to overthrow all manner of *Certainty* either by *Sense* or *Reason*? Must we therefore quit all pretences to *Certainty*, because we cannot, may be, Answer all the Subtilties of the *Scepticks*? And therefore I am by no means satisfied with your manner of proceeding desiring all particular difficulties to be Answer'd, before we consider the evidences of the *Christian Faith*. For the only reasonable way of proceeding in this matter, is to consider, first, whether there be sufficient *Motives* to perswade you to imbrace the *Christian Faith* and then to weigh the difficulties and to compare them with the *Reasons* and *Arguments* for believing; and if those do not appear great enough to overthrow the force of the other, you may remain satisfied.

of the *Scriptures* Answered.

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satisfied in the *Christian Faith*, although you cannot Answer every difficulty that may be raised against the *Books* wherein our Religion is contained. I pray Sir, consider with your self; do not you think it possible for any man to have Faith enough to save him, unless he can solve all the difficulties in *Chronologie* that are in the *Bible*, unless he can give an account of every particular *Law* and *Custom* among the *Jews*, unless he can make out all the *Prophetick Schemes*, and can tell what the *Number* of the *Beast* in the *Apocalypse* means? If a Man may believe and be saved, without these things, to what purpose are they objected for the overthrow of the *Christian Faith*? Do you think a Man hath not reason enough to believe there is extended

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Matter in the World, unless he can solve all the difficulties that arise from the *extension* or *divisibility* of *Matter*; or that he hath a *Soul*, unless he can make it clear how an immaterial and material Substance can be so united as our *Soul* and *Body* are? Or that the *Sun* shines, unless he can demonstrate whether the *Sun* or the *Earth* moves? Or that we have any *certainty* of things, unless he can assign the undoubted *criteria* of *Truth* and *Falshood* in all things? These things I mention on purpose, to let you see, that the most certain things, have difficulties about them, which no one thinks it necessary for him to Answer, in order to his assurance of the *Truth* of the things; but as long as the evidence for them is much more considerable than the Objection

Objections against them , we may safely acquiesce in our assent to them , and leave the unfolding these difficulties to *the Disputers of this World* , or the *Knowledge* of another. Is it not far more reasonable for us to think , that in *Books* of so great *Antiquity* , as those of *Moses* are , written in a Language whose *Idiotisms* are so different from ours, there may be some difficulty in the *Phrases* , or computation of Times or Customs of the People, that we cannot well understand , than that all the Miracles wrought by *Moses* should have been Impostures ; and that Law , which was preserved so constantly, maintained with that resolution by the wisest of the People of the *Jews* , who chose to dye rather than disown it , should be

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all a cheat? Is it not more reasonable for us to suspect our own Understandings, as to the *Speeches* and *Actions* of some of the *Prophets*, than to think that Men who designed so much the advancing Virtue, and discouraging Vice, should be a pack of Hypocrites and Deceivers? Can any Man of common sense suspect the *Christian Religion* to be a *Fourb*, or an Imposture, because he cannot understand the Number of the *Beast*, or Interpret the *Apocalyptic Visions*? I could hardly have believed any Man pretending to *Reason*, could object these things, unless I saw them, and were called upon to Answer them.

Therefore, Sir, my serious and impartial advice to you is, in the first place to consider and debate

bate the main point, i. e. the proofs of the *Christian Doctrin*, and not to hunt up and down the *Scriptures* for every thing that seems a difficulty to you, and then by heaping all these together to make the *Scriptures* seem a confused heap of indigested stuff, which being taken in pieces and considered, with that modesty, diligence, and care, that doth become us, will appear to contain nothing unbecoming that *Sacred* and *Venerable* Name which the *Scriptures* do bear among us.

If therefore, you design not cavilling but satisfaction, you will joyn issue with me upon the most material point, viz. *Whether the Christian Religion were from God, or from Men?* For if this be proved to have been from *God*, all the other things will easily fall off

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off of themselves, or be removed with a little industry.

In the Debate of this, I shall consider, first, what things are agreed upon between us, and then wherein the difference lies.

1. You grant an absolutely perfect and independent Being, whom we call God.

2. That the World was at first Created, and is still governed by Him.

3. That He is so Holy, as to be the Author of no Sin, although he doth not hinder Men from sinning.

4. That this God is to receive from us all Worship proper to Him, of Prayers, Praises, &c.

5. That it is the Will of this God, that we should lead holy, peaceable, and innocent Lives.

6. That God will accept mens sincere

sere Repentance and hearty endeavours to do his Will, although they do not perfectly obey it.

7. That there is a State of Rewards and Punishments in another World, according to the course of Mens Lives here.

8. That there are many excellent Precepts in the writings of the New Testament inducing to Humility and Selfdenyal, and to the Honour of God, and civil duty and honesty of Life; and these in a more plentiful manner than is to be found in any other Profession of Religion publickly known.

The Questions then remaining, are, (1) Whether the matters of Fact are true, which are reported in the Writings of the New Testament? (2) Supposing them true, Whether they do sufficiently prove the Doctrin to have been from God?

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Objections against the Authority

1. *Whether the matters of Fact were true or no? And as to this point, I wish you had set down the Reasons of your doubting, more clearly and distinctly than you have done: What I can pick up, amounts to these things.*

1. *That there can be no certainty of a matter done at such a distance of time, there having been many fictitious Histories in the World.* 2. *That it is probable, that these things might be written, when there was no one Living to detect the falshood of them; and thus you say, the Grecians, Romans, Egyptians, and other Nations were at first imposed upon by some Men, who pretended to deliver to them the History of their Gods and Heroes, and the Wonders wrought by them.*

3. *That these things might more easily be done, before Printing was used; and that there is reason to suspect*

suspect the more, because of the Pious Frauds of the Primitive Christians, and the Legends of the Papists.

4. That there may have been many more Deceptions and Impostures in the way of propagating false Revelations and Miracles than we can now discover.

5. That we ought not to take the Testimony of Scripture, or the Christian Writers in this case, because they may be suspected of partiality; and that the Testimony of Josephus is suspected by divers learned Men to be fraudulently put in by Christians.

6. That there are sufficient grounds from the Story it self, and the Objections of Enemies to suspect the truth of it; because of the contradiction and inconsistency of the parts of it; the want of accomplishment of the Promises and Prophecies of it; the obscurity and unintelligibleness of other parts; the defects of the Persons

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sons mentioned therein, St. Paul's ostentation, the jarrs between Peter and Paul, and Paul and Barnabas.

7. That from these things you have just cause to doubt the Apostles sincerity, and you think they might have indirect ends in divulging the Miracles recorded in Scripture; and that Men might be contented to suffer, to make themselves heads of a new Sect of Religion, and to rule over the Consciences of Men; and that they had time enough to make a considerable interest before the Persecutions began.

This is the force of all I can find out, in the several parts of your Papers towards the invalidating the Testimony concerning the matters of fact reported in the Writings of the New Testament.

In Answer to all these things, I shall shew; 1. That matters of

of fact done at such a distance of time may have sufficient evidence to oblige Men to believe them.

2. That there is no reason to suspect the Truth of those Matters of fact which are contained in the History of the New Testament. 3. That the *Apostles* gave the greatest testimonies of their Sincerity, that could be expected from them; and that no matters of fact were ever better attested than those which are reported by them; from whence it will follow, That it is not reason but unreasonable *Suspicion* and *Scepticism*, if not willfulness and obstinacy which makes Men to continue to doubt after so great evidence.

1. That we may have such evidence of *Matters of Fact* done at such a distance of time as may oblige

Objections against the Authority
 oblige us to believe the Truth of
 them. This we are first to make
 out, because several of your Ob-
 jections seem to imply, That we
 can have no certainty of such
 things; because we cannot know
 what tricks may have been plaid
 in former times, when it was far
 more easie to deceive; and that it
 is confessed, there have been se-
 veral Frauds of this kind, which
 have a long time prevailed in the
 World. But have not the very
 same Arguments been used against
 all Religion, by Atheists? And if
 the Cheats that have been in Re-
 ligion, have no force against the
 Being of God, why should they
 have any against the Christian Re-
 ligion? And if the common con-
 sent of Mankind signifie any
 thing as to the acknowledgement
 of a Deity, why should not the

Testi-

Testimony of the *Christian Church*,
 so circumstantiated as it is, be
 of sufficient strength to receive
 the *Matters of Fact* delivered by
 it? which is all I at present de-
 sire. Do we question any of the
 stories delivered by the common
 consent of *Greek* or *Latin Histor-*
ians, although we have only
 the bare *Testimony* of those
Historians for them? And yet
 our *Objections* would lye against
 every one of them: How do we
 know the great prevalency of
 the *Roman Empire*? was it not
 delivered by those who belonged
 to it, and were concerned to
 make the best of it? What know
 we, but *thousands* of *Histories* have
 been lost, that confuted all that
 we now have concerning the
 greatness of *Rome*? What know
 we, but that *Rome* was destroyed
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Objections against the Authority

by *Carthage*, or that *Hannibal* quite overthrew the *Roman Empire*; or that *Catiline* was one of the best Men in the World, because all our present Histories were written by Men of the other side? How can we tell but that the *Persians* destroyed the *Macedonians*, because all our Accounts of *Alexanders Expedition* are Originally from the *Greeks*? And why might not we suspect greater partiality in all these Cases, when the Writers did not give a thousand part of that evidence for their fidelity, that the First *Christians* did? And yet, what should we think of such a person who should call in question the best Histories of all Nations, because they are written by those of the same Countrey? By which it seems, you will never allow any

any competent Testimony at all ;
 or if such things be written by
 Enemies and Strangers , we have
 reason to suspect both their
 knowledge and integrity ; if
 written by *Friends* , then though
 they might know the *Truth* , yet
 they would write partially of
 their own side : So that upon this
 principle, no History at all, ancient
 or modern is to be believed ; for
 they are all reported either by
 Friends or Enemies : and so not
 only Divine, but all Humane
 Faith will be destroyed. I am
 by no means a Friend to unrea-
 sonable credulity ; but I am as little
 to unreasonable distrust and
 suspicion ; if the one be Folly ,
 the other is Madness. No pru-
 dent Man believes any thing , be-
 cause it is possible to be true ; nor
 rejects any thing meerly because

Objections against the Authority

it is possible to be false: But it is the prudence of every Man to weigh and consider all circumstances, and according to them, to assent, or dissent. We all know it is possible for Men to deceive, or to be deceived, but we know there is no necessity of either; and that there is such a thing as Truth in the World; and though Men may deceive, yet they do not always so; and that Men may know they are not deceived. For else there could be no such thing as Society among Mankind; no *Friendship*, or *Trust*, or *Confidence* in the Word of another person; because it is possible that the best Friend I have may deceive me, and the World is full of dissimulation, must I therefore believe no Body? This is the just consequence of this way

way of Arguing, That we have
reason to suspect the Truth of
these Matters of Fact, because
there have been many Frauds in
the World, and might have been
many more than we can now dis-
cover; for if this Principle be
pursued, it will destroy all So-
ciety among Men; which is
built on the supposition of mu-
tual trust and confidence that
Men have in each other: And
although it be possible for all
Men to deceive, because we
cannot know one anothers hearts,
yet there are such Characters of
Honesty and Fidelity in some
Persons, that others dare venture
their Lives and Fortunes upon
their Words. And is any Man
thought a Fool for doing so?
Nay, have not the most prudent
and sagacious Men reposed a
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mighty confidence in the Integrity of others? And without this, no great affairs can be carried on in the World; for since the greatest Persons need the help of others to manage their business, they must trust other Men continually; and every Man puts his Life into the hands of others, to whom he gives any freedom of access, and especially his Servants: Must a Man therefore live in continual suspicion and jealousy, because it is possible he may be deceived? But if this be thought unreasonable, then we gain thus much, that notwithstanding the possibility of deception, Men may be trusted in some cases, and their Fidelity safely relied upon: This being granted, we are to enquire what that assurance is which makes us trust

trust any one ; and wherever
 we find a concurrence of the
 same circumstances, or equal evi-
 dence of fidelity , we may re-
 pose the same trust or confidence
 in them. And we may soon
 find that it is not any ones bare
 Word that makes us trust him ;
 but either the reputation of his
 Integrity among discerning Men ;
 or our long experience and ob-
 servation of him : This latter is
 only confined to our own tryal ;
 but the former is more general ,
 and reaches beyond our own Age,
 since we may have the *Testimony*
 of discerning Persons convey'd
 down to us in as certain a manner,
 as we can know the mind of a
Friend at a 100 Miles distance, viz.
 by Writing. And in this case, we
 desire no more than to be satis-
 fied that those things were writ-

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ten by them; and that they deserved to be believed in what they writ; thus, if any one would be satisfied about the passages of the *Peloponnesian War*, and hath heard that *Thucydides* hath accurately written it, he hath no more to do, than to enquire whether this *Thucydides* were capable of giving a good account of it, and for that, he hears that he was a great and inquisitive Person, that lived in that Age, and knew all the occurrences of it; and when he is satisfied of that, his next enquiry is, whether he may be trusted or no; and for this, he can expect no better satisfaction, than that his History hath been in great reputation for its integrity among the most knowing Persons; but how shall he be sure this was the History, written by
Thucy-

Thucydides, since there have been many counterfeit Writings obtruded upon the World? Besides the consent of learned Men in all Ages since, we may compare the *Testimonies* cited out of it with the History we have, and the Style, with the Character given of *Thucydides*, and the Narrations, with other credible Histories of those *Times*; and if all these agree, what reason can there be not to rely upon the History of *Thucydides*? All learned Men do acknowledge, that there have been multitudes of fictitious writings, but do they therefore question, whether there are any genuine? Or whether we have not the true *Herodotus*, *Strabo*, or *Pausanias*, because there is a counterfeit *Berosus*, *Manetho*, and *Philo*, set forth by *Annius* of *Viterbo*? Do
any

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any suspect whether we have any of the genuin Works of Cicero, because an *Italian* counterfeited a Book *De Consolatione* in his name? Or whether *Cæsars Commentaries* were his own, because it is uncertain who Writ the *Alexandrian War* that is joyned with them? By which we see, that we may not only be certain of the Fidelity of Persons we converse with, but of all things necessary to our belief of what was done at a great distance of time from the Testimony of Writers, notwithstanding the many supposititious Writings that have been in the World.

But it may be said, That all this only relates to meer matters of History, wherein a Man is not much concerned whether they be true or false; but the things we are about are matters that

that Mens Salvation or Damnation are said to depend upon, and therefore greater evidence should be given of these, to oblige Men to believe them.

To this I answer. 1. That my design herein, was to prove, that notwithstanding the possibility of deception, there may be sufficient ground for a prudent and firm assent to the Truth of things done at as great a distance of time, and convey'd after the same manner, that the Matters of Fact reported in the *New Testament* are; and hereby those general prejudices are shewed to be unreasonable: And all that I desire from this discourse is, that you would give an assent of the same nature to the History of the *Gospel*, that you do to *Cæsar*, or *Livy*, or *Tacitus*, or any other ancient Historian. 2. As to the greater

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greater obligation to assent, I say it depends upon the evidence of Divine Revelation, which is given by the Matters of Fact which are delivered to us. And here give me leave to ask you;

1. Whether it be any ways repugnant to any conception you have of God, for him to make use of fallible Men to make known his Will to the World?

2. Whether those Men, though supposed to be in themselves fallible, can either deceive, or be deceived, when God makes known his Mind to them?

3. Whether on supposition, that God hath made use of such Persons for this end, those are not obliged to believe them, who do not live in the same Age with them? If not, then God must either make no Revelation at all,

or

or he must make a New one every Age: If they are, then the obligation lies as much on us now to believe, as if we had lived and conversed with those inspired Persons.

2. That there is no reason to suspect the Truth of those Matters of Fact which are reported in the *New Testament*; For since it is universally agreed among Men, that *Humane Testimony* is a sufficient ground for assent, where there is no positive ground for suspicion; because deceiving and being deceived, is not the common Interest of Mankind; therefore we are to consider what the general grounds of *suspicion* are, and whether any of them do reach the *Apostles Testimony*, concerning the Matters of Fact reported by them. And the just grounds

Objections against the Authority
grounds of suspicion are these;
1. If the *Persons* be otherwise
known to be Men of artifice and
cunning, full of tricks and dissimulation, and that make no
Conscience of speaking Truth,
so a Lye tends to their greatest
advantage; which is too much
the *Papists* case in their *Legends*,
and *Stories of Miracles*. 2. If
they temper and suit their Story
and Doctrin to the *Humour* and
Genius of the People, they hope
to prevail upon, as *Mahomet* did,
in encouraging *War* and *Lascivious-*
ness. 3. If they lay the Scene of
their Story at a mighty distance
from themselves, at such an Age,
wherein it is impossible either to
prove, or disprove; which is
the case of the *Brachmans*, as to
their *Brahmà*, and their *Veda*;
and was of the *Heathens* as to
their

their Fabulous Deities. 4. If there be any thing contained in the Story, which is repugnant to the most authentick Histories of those times; by which means the Impostures of *Annius* have been discovered. 5. If there be evident contradiction in the Story it self; or any thing repugnant to, or unbecoming the Majesty, Holiness, Sincerity, and Consistency of a Divine Revelation; on which account we reject *Fanatick* pretences to *Revelations*. If there were any thing of this nature in the *Writings* of the *New Testament*, we might then allow there were some ground to suspect the *Truth* of what is contained therein: But I shall undertake, by the Grace of God, to defend that there is not any foundation for suspicion as to any one of these.

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I. As to the *Persons*, such who go about to deceive others, must be Men that are versed in business, and know how to deal with Men; and that have some interest already that they have gained by other means, before they can carry on such a design as to abuse Mankind, by Lyes and Impostures in Religion: Therefore the *Atheists* lay the deceiving the World by Religion, to the Charge of *Politicians* and *Law-givers*, to Men versed in the practice of Fraud, such as *Numa*, or *Lycurgus*, or *Xaca*, or *Mahomet*, such as understood the ways of cajoling the People; or to *subtle Priests*, that know how to suit the hopes and fears of the superstitious multitude; whence came the multitude of Frauds in the *Heathen Temples* and *Oracles*. But would
any

any Man in the World have pitched upon a few *Fishermen*, and illiterate Persons, to carry on such an intrigue as this? Men that were rude and unexperienced in the World, and uncapable of dealing in the way of Artifice with one of the common Citizens of *Hierusalem*. When was it ever heard that such Men made such an alteration in the *Religion* of the World, as the *Primitive Christians* did, against the most violent persecutions? And when they prevailed so much, the common charge still against them was, that they were a company of *Rude, Mean, Obscure, Illiterate, Simple Men*: And yet in spite of all the Cunning, and Malice, and Learning, and Strength of their Adversaries, they gained ground upon them, and prevailed over
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the *Obstinacy* of the *Jews*, and *Wisdom* of the *Greeks*. If the *Christian Religion* had been a meer design of the *Apostles* to make themselves *Heads* of a new *Sect*, what had this been but to have set the *Cunning* of twelve, or thirteen *Men*, of no *Interest*, or *Reputation*, against the *Wisdom* and *Power* of the whole *World*? If they had any *Wisdom*, they would never have undertaken such an impossible design as this must appear to them at first view: And if they had none, how could they ever hope to manage it? If their aim were only at *Reputation*, they might have thought of thousands of ways more probable, and more advantageous than this: If we suppose *Men* should be willing to hazard their *Lives* for their
 Repu-

Reputations, we may suppose withall such Men to have so much cunning as not to do it till they cannot help it; but if they can have Reputation and ease together, they had rather have it. I will therefore put the Case concerning the only Person that had the advantage of a Learned Education among the *Apostles*; viz. *St. Paul*, and whom you seem to strike at more than the rest: Is it reasonable to believe, that when he was in favour with the *Sanhedrin*, and was likely to advance himself by his opposition to *Christianity*, and had a fair prospect of Ease and Honour together; he should quit all this, to joyn with such an inconsiderable and hated company, as the *Christians* were, only to be one of the *Heads* of a very small

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Number of Men, and to purchase it at so dear a rate as the loss of his Friends and Interest, and running on continual Troubles and Persecutions, to the hazard of his Life? It is possible for Men that are deceived and mean honestly to do this; but it is scarce supposable of a Man in his Senses that should know and believe all this to be a *cheat*, and yet own and embrace it, to so great disadvantage to himself: When he could not make himself so considerable by it, as he might have been without it. Men must love *cheating* the World at a strange rate, that will let go fair hopes of preferment and ease, and lead a life of perpetual trouble, and expose themselves to the utmost hazards, only for the sake of deluding others. If the
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and say *they were eye-witnesses of it*, and upon the credit of this *Testimony* of theirs, they Preach Faith and Repentance to *Jews*, and *Gentiles*: Was ever any thing farther from the appearance of Artifice than this was? So that if they were deceivers, they were some of the Subtilest that ever were in the World, because there seems to be so little ground for any suspicion of Fraud; and we cannot easily imagin Persons of their Education, capable of so profound dissimulation and so artificial a Cheat. Besides all this, we are to consider how far such Persons do allow the liberty of *dissimulation* and *artificial Jugglings*, especially in Religion; we see the *Papists* could not practice these things, without being forced to defend them, by shewing how

how convenient it is for the People to be told strange Stories of *Saints*, on purpose to nourish *Devotion* in them: To which end, they say, it signifies not much, whether they were true or no: And withall they assert the *Lawfulness* of *Equivocations*, and *Mental Reservations*, and doing things, not otherwise justifiable, for the *Honour* of their Church and Religion; And I shall freely confess to you, if I found any countenance to such things as these, from the *Doctrine* or *Practice* of the *Apostles*, it would give me too just a ground for suspicion as to what they deliver'd. For if they allowed *Equivocations*, or *Mental Reservations*, how could I possibly know what they meant by any thing they said? For that which was necessary to make the Proposition true,

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lay without my reach in the Mind of another; and while they so firmly attested that *Christ was risen from the Dead*, they might understand it of a *Spiritual or Mystical Resurrection*; but if they should be found to allow *Lying or Cheating for the cause of Religion*, their credit would be gone with me; for how could I be any longer sure of the *Truth* of one Word they said? I should be so far from thinking them *Infallible*, that I could not but suspect them to have a design to deceive me. The first thing therefore we are to look at in Persons who require our belief, is the strictest veracity; if they falter in this, they expose themselves to the suspicion of all but credulous Fools. But we no where find greater plainness and sincerity required,
no

no where more strict and severe prohibitions of dissimulation in Religion, nor more general Precepts about *speaking Truth*, than in the Writings of the *New Testament*. But might not all this be done with the greater artifice to prevent suspicion? Suspicion is a thing, which *be that set bounds to the Sea*, can set no bounds to; if Men will give way to it, without reason, there can be no end of it. For the most effectual ways to prevent it, will still afford new matter and occasion for it. If Men do use the utmost means that are possible, to assure others of their sincerity, and they will not believe them, but still suspect the design to be so much deeper laid; there is no way left possible to satisfy such Men; their suspicion is a disease incurable

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rable by rational means, and such persons deserve to be given over as past all remedy. If Men act like prudent Men, they will judge according to the *Reason* of Things; but if they entertain a jealousy of all Mankind, and the most of those who give them the greatest assurance they have no Intention to deceive them, it is to no purpose to go about to satisfy such Persons, for that very undertaking makes them more suspicious. If the *Apostles* therefore gave as much ground as ever any *Persons* did, or could do, that they had no design to impose upon the World, but proceeding with all the fairness and openness, with the greatest evidence of their sincerity, there can be no reason to fasten upon them the imputation of cunning Men

Men who made it their business to deceive others.

2. This will more appear if we consider the *Matters* deliver'd by them, and the nature of their *Doctrin*. For if the *Christian Religion* were only a contrivance of the first Preachers of it, it must by the event be supposed that they were very subtle Men, who in so little time, and against so great opposition could prevail over both *Jews* and *Gentiles*; but if we reflect on the *nature* of their *Doctrin*, we can never imagin that these Men did proceed by the same Methods that Men of subtilty do make use of. If it were there own contrivance, it was in their power to have framed it as they thought fit themselves; and in all probability, they would have done it in a way most

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most likely to be successful ; but the *Christian Religion* was so far from it , as though they had industriously designed to advance a *Religion* against the *genius* and *inclination* of all Mankind. For it neither gratifies the voluptuous in their Pleasures , nor the Ambitious in their desires of External Pomp and Greatness , nor the Covetous in their thirst after Riches ; but lays a severe restraint on all those common and prevailing Passions of Mankind ; which *Mahomet* well understood , when he suited his *Religion* to them. *Christianity* was neither accommodated to the Temper and Genius either of *Jews* or *Gentiles* : The *Jews* were in great expectation of a Temporal Prince at that time to deliver them from the *Roman Slavery* ; and every one

one that would have set up for
such a *Messias*, might have had
followers enough among them,
as we find afterwards by the
attempts of *Barchocebas* and o-
thers. But the *Messias* of the
Christians was so directly contrary
to their hopes and expectations,
being a *poor* and *suffering Prince*,
that this set them the more against
his Followers, because they were
hereby frustrated of their grea-
test hopes, and defeated in their
most pleasing expectations: But
besides, if they would have ta-
ken in the *Mosaick Law*, it might
in probability have succeeded bet-
ter; but this *St. Paul* would by
no means hear of. But if they
rejected the *Jews*, methinks they
should have been willing to have had
some assistance from the *Gentiles*.
No, they charged them with
Idolatry

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Idolatry where ever they came, and would not joyn in any parts of their Worship with them, nor so much as Eat of the remainder of their Sacrifices. But supposing they had a mind to set up wholly a new Sect of their own; yet we should think they should have framed it after the most plausible manner, and left out all things that were most liable to Reproach and Infamy: But this they were so far from, that the most contemptible part of the Christian Religion, viz. *A Crucified Saviour*, they insist the most upon, and Preach it on all occasions, and in comparison of it, strangely despise all the *Wisdom* and *Philosophy* of the *Greeks*. What did these Men mean, if Christianity had been only a contrivance of theirs? If they had but left out this

this one circumstance, in all Human probability, the excellent moral Precepts in *Christianity* would have been highly magnified among all those who had been bred up under the Instructions of *Philosophers*. Nay, they would not make use of the most commendable Methods of Humane Wisdom; nor do as the *Jesuits* have done in *China*, make Men have a better opinion of the Religion they brought, for their skill in *Mathematicks* and *Astronomy*; but as much as it was possible, to let the World see it was no contrivance of Humane Wisdom, they shunned all the ways of shewing it in the manner of its propagation. Nay, when the People would have given the *Apostles* Divine Worship, never were vain Men more concerned to

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to have it, than they to oppose
it; And do these things look like
the Actions of Men that designed
only to make themselves great,
by being the *Heads* of a new *Sect*
of *Religion*?

3. Men that made it their de-
sign to deceive the World, if
they had thought it necessary to
bring in any matter of *Story* con-
cerning the *Author* of their *Reli-*
gion would have placed it at such
a distance of time, that it was not
capable of being disproved: As
it is apparent in the *Heathen My-*
thologie; for the *Stories* were
such, as no person could ever
pretend to confute them other-
wise than by the inconsistency of
them with the common princi-
ples of *Religion*. But if we sup-
pose *Christianity* to have been a
meer device, would the *Apostles*
have

have been so senseless to have laid the main proof of their *Religion* on a thing which was but newly acted, and which they were very capable of enquiring into all the Circumstances that related to it, viz. the *Resurrection of Christ from the Dead*. We may see by the whole design of the *New Testament*, the great stress of *Christianity* was laid upon the Truth of this; to this, *Christ* himself appealed before hand: to this all the *Apostles* refer as the mighty confirmation of their *Religion*; and this they deliver as a thing which themselves had seen, and had conversed with him for 40 Days together, with all the demonstrations imaginable of a true and real *Body*: And that not to one or two credulous Persons, but so

E many

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many of them who were hard to be satisfied, and one, not without the most sensible evidence; but besides these, they tell us of 500 at once who saw him, whereof many were then living when those things were written. Now I pray tell me what Religion in the World ever put it self upon so fair a tryal as this? Of a plain Matter of Fact as capable of being attested as any could be. Why did not *Amida*, or *Brahma*, or *Xaca*, or any other of the Authors of the present Religions of the *East Indies*? Why did not *Orpheus*, or *Numa*, or any other introducers of Religious Customs among the *Greeks* or *Romans*? Or *Mahomet* among the *Arabians* put the issue of the Truth of their Religion on such a plain and easie tryal as this? If you say That Christ appeared

appeared only to his *Friends*, who were ready to believe such things, and not among his *Enemies*: I Answer, That though they were his *Friends*, yet they were very hard to be perswaded of the *truth* of it at first; and afterwards gave larger Testimonies of their fidelity than the Testimony of the greatest *Enemies* would have been; for we should have had only their *bare Words* for it, (if they would have given that, which is very questionable, considering their dealing with the other *Miracles of Christ*;) But the *Apostles* manifested their *sincerity* by all real proofs that could be thought sufficient to satisfy Mankind; appealing to the very Persons who were concerned the most in it, having a hand in the *Death of Christ*, declaring their greatest

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test readiness to suffer any thing rather than deny the Truth of it, and laying down their Lives at last for it. If all this had been a meer Fiction, how unlikely is it, that among so many as were conscious of it, no one person by hopes or fears, by flatteries or threatnings, could ever be prevailed upon to deny the Truth of it. If there had been any such thing, what triumphing had there been among the *Jews*; and no doubt his name had been Recorded to Posterity among the Writers both of *Jews* and *Gentiles* that were professed Enemies of *Christianity*. But they are all wonderfully silent in this matter; and instead of saying enough to overthrow the truth of *Christianity*, as you seem to suggest, I do assure you, I am mightily

mightily confirmed in the belief of the Truth of it, by carefully observing the slightness of the Objections that were made against it, by its most professed Enemies.

But you seem to imply, *That all this Story concerning Christ was invented long after the pretended time of his being in the World, Why may not you as well suspect, that Julius Cæsar lived before Romulus; or that Augustus lived at the Seige of Troy? For you might as well reject all History upon such grounds as those you assign; and think Mahomet as right in his Chronology, as the Bible. It is time for us to burn all our Books, if we have lived in such a Cheat all this while. Methinks you might as well ask, whether Lucretia were not Pope Joan? Or*

E 3 *Alexan-*

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Alexander the sixth, one of the *Roman Emperours*? Or whether *Luther* were not the *Emperour* of *Turky*? For there is no greater evidence of any *History* in the *World*, than there is, that all the things reported in the *New Testament* were done at that time, when they are pretended to be.

4. Therefore we offer this *Story* of the *New Testament* to be compared with all the *Circumstances* of that *Age*, delivered by any other *Historians*, to try if any *inconsistencies* can be found therein: Which is the most reasonable way can be taken to disprove any *History*. If it could be proved, that there could be no such *Taxation* of the *Empire* as is mention'd in the time of *Augustus*, that *Herod* did not live in that

that *Age*, or that the *Jews* were not under the *Roman Government*, or that there were no *High Priests* at that time, nor the *Sects* of *Pharisees* and *Saducees*, or that there were any other remarkable *characters* of time set down in the *History* of the *New Testament*, which could be manifestly disproved; there were some pretence to call in Question the Truth of the Story; but there is not the least Foundation for any scruple on this account; All things agreeing so well with the truest accounts we have of that *Age*, both from *Josephus* and the *Roman Historie*. I shall not insist on the particular *Testimony* of *Josephus* concerning *Christ*, because we need it not; and if those who question it, would proceed with the same severity against many

E 4 other

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other particular passages in good *Authors*, they might as well call them in question as they do that; since it is confessed, that all the *Ancient Manuscripts* have it in them, and supposing that it doth not come in well, must we suppose it impossible for *Josephus* to Write incoherently? Yet this is the main Argument that ever I have seen urged against this *Testimony* of *Josephus*. But I say, we need it not; all other things concurring in so high a degree to prove the *Truth* of the *History* of *Christ*. Yet since you seem to express so much doubtfulness concerning it, as though it were framed when there was no one living capable of disproving it; give me leave to shew you the great absurdity of such a Supposition. 1. Because we have the plain Testimonies of
 -the

the greatest Enemies of *Christi-*
anity, that there was such a Per-
son as *Christ* was, who suffered
according to the *Scripture Story*.
For *Tacitus* not only mentions the
Christians as suffering at *Rome* for
their Religion in the time of *Nero*,
(*Annal.* 15.) but saith, That the
Author of this Religion was one
Christ, who suffered under *Pontius*
Pilate, Procurator of *Judea*, in
the time of *Tiberius*; which is an
irrefragable Testimony of the
Truth of the Story concerning
Christ, in an Age, when if it
had been false, nothing could
have been more easily detected
than such a Fiction, by the num-
ber of *Jews* which were continu-
ally at *Rome*: And neither *Julian*,
nor *Celsus*, nor *Porphyrie*, nor
Lucian did ever question the truth
of the Story it self; but only up-
braided

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braided the *Christians* for attributing too much to *Christ*. 2. If there were really such a Person as *Christ* was, who suffered as *Tacitus* saith, then the whole Story could not be a Fiction, but only some part of it; and these additional parts must either be contrived by the *Apostles*, or after their time: Not after their time, for then they must be added after *Christianity* was received in the World, for that, as appears by *Tacitus*, was spread in the *Apostles* times as far as *Rome*; and if these parts were not received with it; the Cheat would presently have been discover'd as soon as broached, by those who had embraced *Christianity* before: And besides, *Tertullian* in his time appeals to the *Authentick Writings* of the *Apostles* themselves, which were

were then extant , wherein the same things were contained , that we now believe : If these things then were forged , it must be by the *Apostles* themselves ; and I dare now appeal to you, whether ever any Story was better capable of being disproved than this was, if it had not been true , since it was published in that very time and place , where the *Persons* were living , who were most concerned to disprove it : As appears by the hatred of the *Jews* to the *Christians* , both then and ever since : which is a very observable circumstance for proving the truth of *Christian Religion* ; for the *Jews* and *Christians* agreed in the *Divine Revelations* of old , the *Christians* believed moreover, that *Christ* was the *Messias* promised ; this *Christ* lived and dyed among the

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the *Jews* his Enemies ; his *Apostles* Preached, and wrought Miracles among their most inveterate Enemies , which Men that go about to deceive never care to do : And to this Day the *Jews* do not deny the Matters of *Fact* , but look on them as insufficient to prove *Jesus* of *Nazareth* to have been the *Messias* : Nay , *Mahomet* himself , who in all probability would have overthrown the whole Story of the *New Testament* , if he could have done it with any colour ; yet speaks very honourably of *Christ* and of the great things which were said and done by him.

5. That there is nothing in the *Christian Religion* , unbecoming the *Majesty*, or *Holiness* , or *Truth* of a *Divine Revelation*. As to the precepts , you acknowledge their excellency ;

cellency ; and the *Promises* chiefly refer either to *Divine Grace* , or *future Glory* ; And what is there herein unbecoming *God* ? And as to what concerns the *Truth* of it , we have as great *Characters* of that throughout , as it is possible for us to expect ; there appearing so much simplicity , sincerity , candour , and agreement in all the parts of it. Some Men would have been better pleased , it may be , if it had been all written by one *Person* , and digested into a more exact method , and set forth with all the *Lights* and *Ornaments* of *Speech*. This would have better become an *Invention* of Men , but not a *Revelation* of *God* : Plainness and simplicity have a natural greatness above art and subtilty ; and therefore *God* made choice of many

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many to write, and at several times, that by comparing them we may see how far they were from contriving together, and yet how exactly they agree in all things which Men are concerned to believe. But you say, *We have many infirmities of the Apostles discovered therein, their heats and animosities one against another.* But I pray consider; 1. How came you to know these things; Is it not by their own Writings? And if they had been such, who minded only their applause, had it not been as easie to have concealed these things, and would they not certainly have done it, if that had been their aim? If St. Paul seems to boast, doth he not do it, with that constraint to himself, as a Man that is forced to do it for his own vindication
against

against malicious Enemies? And who ever denyed a Man of a generous mind the liberty of speaking for himself? 2. But suppose *they had infirmities and heats among them*; doth this prove that God could not make use of them as his Instruments to declare his Truth to the World? Then it will follow, that God must never reveal his will by Men, but by Voices from Heaven, or Angels, or the assumption of the humane Nature by the Divine. But, if God be not denyed the liberty of employing meer Men, we cannot find so great evidences of Piety and Zeal, of Humility and Self-denyal, of Patience and Magnanimity, of Innocency and universal Charity in any Men as were in the Apostles; And therefore did appear with the most

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 most proper *Characters* of *Em-*
bassadors from Heaven. And I dare
 venture the comparison of them
 with the best *Philosophers*, as to the
 greatest and most excellent *virtues*,
 for which they were the most ad-
 mired ; notwithstanding the
 mighty difference as to their Edu-
 cation ; allowing but the same
 Truth as to the Story of the
New Testament , which we yield
 to *Xenophon* , or *Diogenes Laertius* ,
 or any other Writers concerning
 them.

But what is it then which
 you object against the Wri-
 tings of the *New Testament* ,
 to make them inconsistent with
 the Wisdom of God ? I find
 but two things in the Papers you
 sent me. 1. *Want of the conti-*
nuance of the Power of Miracles ,
which you say is Promised. Mark

16. 17. 2. The number of the Beast in the Revelations. But, Good Sir, consider, what it is to call in question a Divine Revelation for such Objections as these are? Must there be no Revelation, unless you understand every Prophecy, or the extent of every promise? Be not so injurious to your own Soul, for the sake of such Objections, to cast away the great assurance which the *Christian Religion* gives us, as to the Pardon of Sin upon Repentance here, and eternal Happiness in another World. Would you reject all the Writings of *Plato*, because you do no more understand some part of his *Ti-mæus* than the number of 666? You must have a very nice faith, that can bear with no difficulties at all, so that if there be but

F one

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one or two hard things that you cannot digest, you must throw up all the best Food you have taken; at this rate you must starve your Body, as well as ruin your Soul. But of these places afterwards.

3. I have hitherto removed the grounds of Suspicion, I now come to shew the positive Testimonies of their Sincerity which the *Apostles* shewed, which were greater than were ever given to any other Matter of Fact in the *World*. I will then suppose the whole *Truth* of the *Christian Doctrine* to be reduced to this one Matter of Fact, Whether *Christ*
 × *did rise from the dead or no?* for (as I have said already) it is plain, the *Apostles* put the main force of all that they said upon the *Truth* of this; and often declared, that they were appointed to be the
Witnesses

Witnesses of this thing. Now let us consider how it is possible for Men to give the highest assurance of their *sincerity* to others; and that must be either by giving the utmost Testimony that Men can give; or by giving some Testimony above that of Men, which cannot deceive, which is the *Testimony of God*.

1. They gave the utmost Testimony that meer Men could give of their *fidelity*. I know no better way we have for a full assurance as to any humane Testimony, than to consider what those Circumstances are which are generally allowed to accompany Truth, and if we have the concurrence of all these, we have as much as can be expected: For nothing that depends on Testimony can be proved by *Mathematical*

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tical Demonstration. But notwithstanding the want of this, either we may have sufficient ground to assent to *Truth* upon *Testimony*, or there can be no difference known between *Truth* and *Falshood* by *Humane Testimony*; which overthrows all Judicial proceedings among Men; the *Justice* whereof doth suppose not only the *veracity* of *Humane Testimony*; But that it may be so discerned by others, that they may safely rely upon it. Now the main things to be regarded as to the *Truth* of *Humane Testimony* are these. 1. If
 x Men testifie nothing but what they saw. 2. If they testifie it at no long distance of time from the thing done. 3. If they testifie it plainly, and without doubtful expressions. 4. If a great number agree in the same
 [Testi-

Testimony. 5. If they part with all that is valuable to Mankind, rather than deny the Truth of what they have testified: And where all these concur, it is hardly possible to suppose greater evidence to be given of the Truth of a Thing; and now I shall shew that all these do exactly agree to the Apostles Testimony concerning the Resurrection of Christ.

1. They testified nothing but what they saw themselves. The Laws of Nations do suppose that greater credit is to be given to eye witnesses than to any others, thence the Rule in the Civil Law *Testimonium de auditu regulariter non valet*: Because, say the Civilians and Canonists, Witnesses are to testify the Truth, and not barely the possibility of things; that which Men see, they can testify whether they

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they are or not: That which Men only hear, may be, or not be; and their *Testimony* is not of the *Fact*, but is looked on as more uncertain, and ought to have greater allowances given it; but the Apostles testified only *what they saw and handled*; and that after the most scrupulous enquiry into the *Truth* of *Christs Body*, and after many doubts and suspicions among themselves about it; so that they did not seem hastily and rashly to believe what they afterwards declared to the World. Now a *Body* was a proper object of Sense, and no trial could be greater, or more accurate than theirs was; nor any satisfaction fuller than putting their *fingers* into the very *wounds* of the *pierced side*.

2. They did not stay till the
circum-

circumstances might have slipped out of their Memories, before they testified these things; but very soon after, while the impression of them was fresh upon them: If they had let these Matters alone for any long time, the *Jews* would have asked them presently, if these things were true, why did we not hear of them as soon as they were done? Therefore we see the Apostles on the very day of *Pentecost*, a little after *Christs* ascension to Heaven, openly and boldly declare the *Truth* of these things, not in private corners among a few *Friends*, but in the most solemn meeting of their Nation from all parts; which was the worst time could have been chosen, if they had any intention to deceive.

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3. They testifie it in as plain a manner as is possible, on purpose to prevent all mistakes of their meaning, *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are Witnesses; Therefore let all the House of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.* Men that had a mind to deceive would have used some more general and doubtful words, than these were.

Acts 2. 32. 36.

4. If this had been testified by one single witness, the World would have suspected the Truth of his Testimony; for according to the Rule in the Civil Law in the case of Testimony, *Vox unius, vox nullius est*: But this was testified by very many; not meerly by the twelve Apostles, but by 500 at once; among whom some might

might be supposed to have so much honesty, or at least capable of being perswaded to have discovered the Imposture, if they had in the least suspected any.

5. But that which adds the greatest weight to all this, is, ^x that there was not one of all the Apostles, and scarce any one of the rest, but exposed themselves to the utmost *hazards* and *dangers*, rather than deny or retract the *Truth* of what they witnessed. If the *People* had been careless and indifferent about *Religion*, it is possible Men might have gone on in a Lye so long till they had gotten *interest* enough to maintain it; but no sooner did the Apostles appear, witnessing these things, but they met with an early and vigorous opposition, and that from the chiefest Men in *Power*,

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Power, who made it their business to suppress them. Now in this case, they were put to this choice, if they would renounce or conceal the *Truth* of what they testified, they might presently enjoy ease, and it may be, rewards too; but if they went on, they must look for nothing but the sharpest persecution; and this they met with almost in all places; and is it conceivable, that Men should be so fond of a *lye*, to forsake all and follow it, and at last to take up their cross for it? If *credit* and *interest* in the hearts of People, might carry a Man on a great way in the delusion, yet he would be loth to dye for it; and yet there was never a one of the Apostles, but ventured his life for the *Truth* of this; and all but one, they tell us, did suffer
Martyr-

Martyrdom for it. I pray, Sir, consider, where you ever meet with any thing like this, that so many Men should so resolutely dye, for what themselves at the same time knew to be a lye; and that they must certainly do, if it were all a contrivance of their own heads.

2. But although in these things they went as high as it was possible for *humane Testimony* to go, yet they had something beyond all this, which was a *concurrence* of a *Divine Testimony*, in the *miraculous gifts and operations* of the *Holy Ghost*. And this we assert to be the highest Testimony can be given in the World, of a *Truth* of any thing; because God will not employ his *Power* to deceive the World. And as all other *Truth* hath a *criterion* proper to

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 to it ; so this seems to be the pro-
 per *criterion* of a *Divine Testimony*,
 that it hath the *power of Miracles*
 going along with it. For if we
 do suppose God to make known
 his Mind to the World , it is very
 reasonable to believe there should
 be some *distinguishing note* of what
 is immediately from God , and
 what comes only from the *inven-*
tions of Men ; and what can be
 more proper to distinguish what
 comes from *God*, and what from
Men , than to see those things
 done which none but *God* can do ?
 But against this you object several
 things, which I shall easily and
 briefly Answer.

1. You cannot tell what it is that
Miracles do attest ; not all their *Do-*
ctrin , since Paul said , some was
 not from the Lord. Answ. *Mira-*
cles do attest the *veracity* of the
 Speaker ,

Speaker, and by consequence the truth of the *Doctrin*; not that you should believe that to be from the Lord, which he said was not; but that which he said, was from the Lord. But when he makes such a distinction himself, it is very unreasonable to urge that as an Argument, that he had *nothing from the Lord*; it is much rather an argument of his candor and ingenuity, that he would not pretend to *Divine Revelation*, when he had it not.

2. You would have it signified, what *Doctrin* it is which is attested by Miracles, since the *Doctrins* of Scripture lye in heaps and confusion.

Ans. To what purpose should any *Doctrins* be singled out to have the Seal of Miracles set to them, since it is their *Divine Commission* to Teach and declare the

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 the *Will* of *God*, which is *sealed* by
 it? And what they did so Teach
 and declare, is easily known by
 their Writings.

3. But why do not Miracles still
 continue? *Ans^w*. Because there
 are no Persons employ'd to Teach
 any new Doctrines; and no Pro-
 mise of Scripture doth imply any
 more: For the signs which were
 to follow them that believe, were
 such as tended to the first confir-
 mation of the *Christian Faith*;
 which being effected, their use
 ceased; and so to ask why God
 doth not continue a Gift of Mi-
 racles to convince Men that the
 former were true, is to the same
 purpose as to ask why God doth
 not make a New Sun, to satisfie
 Athiests that he made the Old?

4. But doth not the Scripture say,
 that wonders are not always to be
 taken

taken as confirmations of the Truth of Doctrin, since false Prophets may work Wonders, Deuteron. 13. 1.

Ans^w. That signifies no more, than that Wonders are not to be believed against the Principles of Natural Religion; or Revealed Religion already confirmed by greater Miracles: And that those who would value such a particular sign above all the series of Miracles their Religion was first established by, may be justly left to their own delusions. You might as well object the lying Wonders of the Man of Sin, against all the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles. If God hath once done enough to convince Men, he may afterwards justly leave them to the tryal of their Ingenuity; as a Father that hath used great care to make his Son understand
true

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true Coyn, may afterwards suffer *false* to be laid before him, to try whether he will mind his being cheated or no?

5. But you may yet farther demand, *what the Testimony of Miracles doth signifie to the Writings of the New Testament?* *Answ.* 1. The Miracles do sufficiently prove the *Authority* of that *Doctrin*, which was delivered by those who wrought *Miracles*; as *Christ* and his *Apostles*. 2. If there had been the least ground to question the *Truth* and *Authority* of these *Writings*, they had never been so universally received in those *Ages*, when so many were concerned to enquire into the *Truth* of these things; for we see several of the *Books* were a long time examined, and at last, when no sufficient reason could be

be

be brought against them, they were received by those Churches, which at first scrupled the receiving them: And I am so far from thinking the doubts of the first Ages any Argument against the Authority of a Book, that by the objections of some against some of them, I am thereby assured, that they did not presently receive any Book, because it went under the name of an *Apostolical Writing*: As I am the more confirmed in the belief of the *Resurrection of Christ*, because some of the *Disciples* were at first very doubtful about it.

6. You may yet ask, *What doth all this signifie to the Writings of the Old Testament, which were written at a longer distance of Time from us, and in a more Ignorant Age of the World?* Answ. There cannot

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not be a more evident proof of the *Old Testament*, than by the *New*: For if the *New* be true, the *Old* must be so, which was confirmed so plainly and evidently by it; our Saviour and his Apostles appealing to Moses and the Prophets on all occasions. So that the same Miracles which prove their Testimony true, do at the same time prove the Divine Authority of the *Old Testament*, since it is so expressly said in the *New*, That Holy Men of God did speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

But after all this, You urge, that you have discover'd such things in these Writings as could not come from God, as

1. Contradictions in them.
2. Some things inconsistent with the Wisdom of God.
3. Promises made that were never fulfilled.
4. Things so obscure

as

as no one can tell the meaning of them. Under these four Heads I shall examin the particular allegations you bring against the Scriptures.

1. Under the head of Contradictions, you insist on the Prophecy Gen. 15. 13, 14, 15, 16. made to Abraham concerning his Posterity; compared with the Accomplishment mentioned, Exod. 12. 40. 41. And the force of your Argument lyes in this, That the Prophecy in Genesis doth imply that the Servitude of the Children of Israel in Egypt was to be 400 Years; or 430 saith Exod. but both these are repugnant to other places of Scripture, which make their abode in Egypt not to exceed 215 Years; or at the highest, by the number of Generations could not exceed 350 Years, stretching them to the utmost advantage. To this which you lay so much weight

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weight upon, I Answer distinctly,

1. By your own confession, supposing the 430 Years to begin from the Covenant made with *Abraham*, the accomplishment mentioned, *Exod. 12. 40.* doth fall out exactly in the time of the *Children of Israels* going out of *Egypt*, for you have proved from *Scripture*, that from the Covenant with *Abraham* to *Jacobs* being in *Egypt*, were 215 Years; to which you add, that *Coath* being supposed 5 Years Old at the going into *Egypt*; and that at 70 Years he Begat *Amram*, and that *Amram* at 70 Begat *Moses*, to which *Moses* his 80 Years being added, makes up the other 215 Years, whereby we have the full 430 Years, by your own computation. Now, Sir, I pray consider what reason you have

to charge the Scripture with contradiction in a Matter your self acknowledges, so exactly accomplished in this way of computation?

2. But you say, *the Words will not bear this; because they speak of the 400 Years to expire in their Servitude in Egypt.* Answ. For this we must consider the importance of the Words both in *Genesis* and *Exodus*. There is not a Word of *Egypt* mentioned in *Genesis*; but only in general it is said, *Thy Seed shall be a Stranger in the Land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them 400 Years;* and it will conduce very much to the right understanding this Prophecy to consider the main scope and design of it, which was not to tell *Abraham* how long they should be in servitude to the *Egyptians*,

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tians, but how long it would be before his Seed should come to the possession of the promised Land; And it seems *Abraham* by the *Question*, Gen. 15. 7. 8. did expect to have the Inheritance of this Land in his own time: To this therefore *God* Answers, by telling him, he meant no such thing, but it was intended for his Seed, and that not suddenly neither, for they were to tarry till the iniquity of the Amorites should be full, which would not be till the fourth Generation; and then his Seed should after 400 Years, come to the Possession of the Promised Land; but in the mean time they were to Sojourn in a Land that was not theirs, and to meet with many hardships and difficulties. This is plainly the scope of this prophecy, and by attending to it, the great Objections presently

presently appear without force; for the *Land of Canaan* notwithstanding the Promise, was by the Patriarchs themselves looked on as a *Land* wherein they were Strangers. So *Abraham* saith Gen. 23. 4. *I am a Stranger and a Sojourner with you; and which is more remarkable in the blessing of Jacob by Isaac, to whom the Promise was made, it is said; And give thee the Blessing of Abraham to thee, and to thy Seed, that thou mayest inherit the Land wherein thou art a Stranger, which God gave unto Abraham, Gen. 28. 4. Where the very same Word is used concerning Jacob, that is expressed in the Prophecy, Gen. 15. 13. So that the Patriarchs looked on themselves as Strangers in the Land of Canaan, so long after the promise made, and after*

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 the *increase* of the Seed of *Abraham* ;
 And therefore the land of *Canaan*
 was called *Terra Peregrinationum*,
 the Land wherein they were stran-
 gers ; Gen. 36. 7. -- 37. 1. And
 when God was calling the People
 of *Israel* together out of *Egypt*,
 yet then the Land of *Canaan* was
 called by the very same title,
 the Land of their Pilgrimage, where-
 in they were Strangers : *Exod.* 6. 4.
 And *Pf.* 105. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.
 where we have a full account of
 the Promise made to *Abraham*,
Isaac, and *Jacob*, concerning the
 inheritance of that Land it is said,
 that they were few, and Strangers in
 it, when they went from one Nation
 to another, from one Kingdom to
 another People. Which doth fully
 explain the meaning of the Pro-
 phesy in *Genesis*, and that it is
 not to be restrained to the servi-
 tude

tyde of the People of Israel in Egypt,
 but to be understood of their
 state of Pilgrimage for 400 Years,
 wherein they were to suffer great
 hardships, before they should
 come to the Inheritance of Ca-
 naan. This is no forced or unnatural
 exposition of the Words, as you
 seem to suggest; but to my ap-
 prehension, very plain and easie,
 if we attend to the main scope
 and design of them which was
 to acquaint Abraham how long it
 would be before the prophecy were
 accomplished, and what the
 condition of his Seed should be
 the mean time, viz. That they
 should have no Land which they should
 call their own by Inheritance all that
 time, but they should be exposed to
 great hardships, yea even to Servi-
 tude; but that Nation whom they
 should serve, should at last suffer for
 their

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their ill usage of them, and they should come out of that Captivity with great substance; and all this to be done in the fourth Generation of the Amorites when their Iniquities should be arrived at the full height. All which particulars, were so remarkably accomplished at such a distance of time, and under such improbable circumstances, that that this very prophecy were enough to convince an unprejudiced mind, that it came from Divine Inspiration. For where do we meet with any thing like this in the Histories of other Nations? viz. A Prophecy to be accomplished 400 Years after, and the very manner foretold, which no humane conjecture could reach to, since the manner of deliverance of the People of Israel out of their Captivity in Egypt,

Egypt, was to all humane appearance so impossible a thing, especially at such a time when the *Spirits* of the People were sunk and broken by so long a slavery: And not only the manner foretold, but the accomplishment happened to a day, according to *Exodus* 12. 41. And it came to pass at the end of the 430 Years, even the selfe-same day it came to pass, that all the *Hosts* of the Lord went out from the Land of Egypt. But against this you object, That the sojourning is spoken of the Children of Israel in Egypt for 430 Years; which cannot hold good any ways; since, to make it up, the times of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, must be taken in who could not be called the Children of Israel. *Ans.* For the 430 Years, I grant, that according to St. Paul, they

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they did commence from the Covenant made to *Abraham* Gal. 3. 17. and that the 400 Years began from *Isaac's* being owned for the *Promised Seed*; between which time the 30 Years were passed; and all appearance of difficulty is avoided, if we admit the reading of the best Copies of the *LXX.* which is in these words, Ἡ δὲ παροίκησις τῶν υἱῶν

Ἰσραὴλ, ἣν παρώχισαν ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ, καὶ ἐν γῇ Χαναάν, αὐτοὶ καὶ οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν ἔτη τετρακό-

σια τεράκοντα, Now the sojourning of the Children of Israel who dwelt in Egypt and Canaan, they and their Fathers was 430 Years. This is the reading of our *Alexandrian* Copy, and the *Complutensian*, and that of *Aldus*, and of *Eusebius* in his *Chronicon*, and of *St. Hierome* in his Translation of it; and

and of the Church in St. *Augustins* time, and afterwards; and lest any should reject this as a late Interpolation, or gloss received into the Text, besides these Testimonies of the Antiquity of it, we find the very same in the *Samaritan Copy*, which the Enemies of it do allow to be as ancient as our *Saviours* time. And that which very much confirms the Truth of this reading is, that the *Jews* themselves follow the sense of it, who are the most eager contenders for the Authority of the *Hebrew Copy*; who all agree, that the beginning of the Computation of the 430 Years is to be taken before the Children of *Israels* going into *Egypt*: and *Menasseh Ben Israel* contends with many others, that the 430 Years did begin from the

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the *Promise* made to *Abraham*, and
the 400 from the time of *Isaac*,
to which their most ancient
Books of Chronology do agree,
and to the same purpose speak
both *Philo Judæus*, and *Josephus*;
who although in one place he
seems to make the *Israelites af-*
liction in Egypt to have been 400
Years, yet when he speaks more
particularly of it, he makes the
time of their abode in *Egypt* to have
been only 215, and the 430 to be-
gin from *Abrahams* entrance into
Canaan: The *Targum* of *Jona-*
than begins the 430 from the
Vision of Abraham, and the 400
from the *Birth of Isaac*; all
which I mention, to let you see
that the *Jews* themselves do in
sense concur with the *Samaritan*
and *Greek Copy*; and therefore
we have more reason to suspect
some-

something left out in the present
Hebrew, than any thing added
 in those Copies. But doth not this
 take off from the Authority of the
Scripture? Not at all: For the
 only Question is about the True
 Reading: And having the con-
 sent of the Samaritan, *Alexan-*
drian, and other Copies of the
LXX. and of the Ancient
Church; and of the *Jews* them-
 selves as to the sense of it, we
 have reason to look on this as
 the truer Reading: Which is
 making no addition to the *scri-*
pture either as to Persons or Places,
 but only producing the more
 Authentick Copy; much less
 is this Adding or Changing as
 we please, for if we did this
 without so much Authority as we
 have for it, you might as easily
 reject it as we produce it.

3. After

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3. After all this, I do not see the mighty force of your Reason to charge the Scripture with Contradiction; supposing *the 400 Years were to be spent in the servitude of the Children of Israel in Egypt.* I confess, when I found the Scripture so boldly, so frequently charged with no less than Contradiction, I expected something like Demonstration in the Case, especially in this place which you chose to put in the Front of all; but I do not find any thing like such a proof of a Contradiction, supposing we should allow the 400 Years to be spent in Egypt. Yes, say you, *Coath was 5 Years Old when he came down into Egypt; and When he had lived there 65 Years he begat Amram, and Amram being 70 Years Old begat Moses, to which Moses his 80 Years being added,*

added, we have only 215 Years.
But since the Scripture doth not
assign, the particular Age of
any of these, when they begat
their Children, I see no impossi-
bility or repugnancy in the sup-
position, that 400 Years should
pass from *Levi's* going into *Egypt*,
to the Eightieth of *Moses*, any
more than from *Salmons* entrance
into *Canaan* to the time of *David*,
for no more are reckoned in scrip-
ture than *Boaz* the Son of *Salmon*,
by *Raab*, and *Obed*, and *Jesse*; So
that by the same way, this lat-
ter may be explained, the for-
mer may be so too. If it be
said, That either they begat their
Children at a great Age, or that the
scripture in Genealogies doth not set
down all the intermediate Parents,
but only the most eminent, (as *Caleb*
is called the Son of *Efron*.

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1 Chron. 2. 9, 18. although there was at least one between them,) the very same Answer will serve to clear this part of the Chronology of Scripture from any appearance of Contradiction. These things you might have found more largely deduced and fully handled by those Learned Persons, who have undertaken to clear the Chronology of Scripture : Who were men of more Judgment, than from any difficulty of this nature, to call in question the Truth and Authority of the sacred Scriptures ; and although the Opinions of Chronologers, are like the City Clocks, which seldom agree, yet some come nearer the time of the day than others do ; and therefore you ought to examine and compare them before you pronounce so peremptorily about

about Contradictions in *scripture*, which you have no reason to do till you find that no one *hypothesis* among them will serve to free the *scripture* from Contradiction: For otherwise, you do but blame the *Sun*, because you cannot make the *Clocks* agree.

This is all I can find in your Papers under the *head* of Contradictions; and I leave you now soberly to consider, whether this place did afford you sufficient ground for so heavy a Charge; but if you say, you have a great many more by you, but you sent me this only for a *Trial* of my skill; before you send any more; I beseech you, Sir, to consider,

1. How easily things do appear to be Contradictions to weak, or unstudied, or prejudiced minds, which after due

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consideration appear to be no such things. A deep prejudice finds a Contradiction in every thing; whereas in *Truth*, nothing but ill will, and impatience of considering, made any thing, it may be, which they Quarrel at, appear to be so. If I had been of such a quarrelsome humour, I would have undertaken to have found out more Contradictions in your Papers, than you imagin, and yet you might have been confident, you had been guilty of none at all. When I consider the great pains, and Learning, and Judgement, which hath been shewn by the *Christian Writers* in the Explication of the *Scriptures*; and the raw, indigested Objections which some love to make against them, if I were to judge of things barely by

by the fitness of persons to judge of them, the disproportion between these, would appear out of all comparison. A modest Man would in any thing of this nature say with himself, methinks, if there were such Contradictions in the *Bible*, as now seem to me; so many persons of incomparable Abilities in the First, and latter Ages of the *Christian Church*, who have made it their business to enquire into these things, would have discerned them before me: And yet they retained a mighty veneration for the *scriptures*, as coming from God himself; and therefore it may be only weakness of Judgement, want of Learning, or some secret prejudice may make me suspect these things; or else I must suspect the honesty of

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all those persons who have pretended such a Devotion to the Scriptures, and yet have believed them full of Contradictions.

2. *Wherein* the Contradiction appears. Is it in the main and weighty parts of the Religion revealed herein; or is it only in some smaller Circumstances as to time and place? The great thing you are to look after, are the Matters those Scriptures tell you your Salvation depends upon; and if there be a full consent, and agreement therein; you find enough for you to believe and practice. And if some Contradictions should still appear to you in smaller Matters, what follows from thence, but only that the same care was not taken about little, as about great things? And you ought to set that appearance

rance of Contradiction in small
 Matters , together with the real
 consent in the things of the high-
 est importance ; and from thence
 rather to infer , that this was no
 combination or design to deceive
 others ; for such persons take the
 greatest care to prevent suspicion ,
 by their exactness in every minute
 Circumstance ; and sometimes
 the over-much care to prevent
 suspicion doth raise it the more.

3. *What ways* have been used
 by Men of judgement and lear-
 ning , to clear those places from
 the charge of Contradiction.
 For, not one of the Objections
 you can start now, but hath been
 considered over and over ; and
 all the difficulties that belong to
 it examined ; If you will not
 take the pains to do this ; it is
 plain you do not desire satisfacti-
 on,

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 on, but only seek for a pretence to cavil; especially, if you only search the weakest or most injudicious Writers on the Scriptures, and endeavour to expose their opinions, without taking notice of what others have said with more clear and evident Reason. This shews either want of Judgment in choosing such Expositors, or want of Candor and fair dealing and a desire of taking any advantage against the Scriptures.

4. How hard a Matter it is for us at this distance to understand exactly the grounds of *Chronology*, or the manner of computation of Times used so long ago: and therefore in all difficulties of this nature, we ought to make the fairest allowances that may be, considering with-

withall, that escapes and errors are no where more easily committed by Transcribers, than in *numbers*: and that it is a very unreasonable thing, that a *Book* otherwise deserving to be thought the best *Book* in the World, should be scorned and rejected, because there appears some difference in the *computation* of *times*. We do not so exactly know the manner of the *Hebrew Chronology*, nor, the nature of their *Year*, or *Intercalations*, nor the customs of their *Genealogies*, nor the allowance to be made for *interregnums*, so as to be able to define peremptorily in these things; but it is sufficient to shew, that there is no improbability in the accounts that are given; and no sufficient reason can be drawn from thence to reject

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 reject the Authority of the Scrip-
 tures.

2. I come to consider the places you object, as containing things inconsistent with the Wisdom, or Goodness of God, according to a rational perswasion; and those are either, 1. From the Laws of Moses. 2. From the express story of the Bible, or actions of the Prophets.

1. From the Laws of Moses: Your first Objection is from Exod. 21. 7. Where a Man is supposed to sell his Daughter; which you say, it is incredible to believe that God should permit; because it implies unnatural affection and covetousness in the Father. But, Sir, 1. You do not consider, that this is barely a provisional Law, and is not the permission of the thing, so much as the regulation of it, supposing it

it to be done, *i. e.* in case a Man should part with his interest in his Daughter to another Person, upon an extraordinary case of necessity, as the *Jews* understand it; yet then, she was not to be in the condition of a Servant, but to be either Betrothed to the Person who receiv'd her, or to his Son; which was intended for the restraint of promiscuous Buying and Selling Daughters, meerly for the satisfaction of Lust. The *Jews* who certainly best understood their own Judicial *Laws*, do say, that this was never to be done, but where there was a presumption of such a *betrothing*; for no Man could Sell his Daughter to those to whom it was unlawful for her to *Marry* by their *Law*; so that this was looked on as a kind of *Esponsals* of a young Girle,

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Girl, taken into Wardship by another; but so, that if she were not Betrothed, she was to remain her 6 Years during her Minority, as the *Jews* understand it; unless she were redeemed, or set Free, or the *Jubile* came, or the Master dyed, or the time of her Minority expired.

2. The case of *necessity* being supposed, it hath been thought lawful for *Parents* to make advantage by their *Children*, not only by the *Jews*, but by other Nations, who have been in the greatest esteem for Wisdom. For by the *Law* of the 12 *Tables*, among the *Romans*, the *Father* had the liberty of Selling his Son three times, for his own advantage, as *Dionys. Halicarnassens* relates; and before that time, it was not only in use among
the

the *Romans*, but in such esteem among them, that upon the review of their *Laws* the *Decemviri* durst not leave it out; but by one of the *Laws* of *Numa Pompilius*, it was restrained to the times before Marriage, for in case the Son had the *Fathers* consent to Marry, he could not Sell him afterwards, as the same *Author* tells us. This *Law* continued in force among them, till *Christianity* prevailed in the *Roman Empire*, for although there were a prohibition of *Diocletian* against it, yet that signified nothing, till *Constantine* took care, That such indigent *Parents* should be relieved out of the publick charge, *Cod. Theodos. l. 11. tit. 27. 2.* And yet after this, the Custom did continue, when the *Parents* were in great want, as appears by a *Law*

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Law of Theodosius, Cod. 3. tit. 3.
Omnes quos Parentum misera fortuna in servitium dum victum requirunt addixit, ingenuitati pristinae reformatur. And it further appears, that even in *Constantin's* time, notwithstanding the Law made by him, Parents would still, when they thought themselves overcharged with Children, part with their Interest in them to others for advantage, but it was chiefly while they were *sanguinolenti*, as the Law expresses it, *i. e. new Born.* Cod. *Theod. l. 5. tit. 8.* By the Laws of *Athens*, before *Solons* time, Parents might sell their Children, as appears by *Plutarch*, in his Life; and the same *Philostratus* reports of the *Phrygians*, *l. 3. vit. Apollon. Tyan.* and the like custom doth obtain among the *Chineses* to this day

day, if persons do think themselves unable to bring up their Children themselves. And there are two things to be said for it.

1. The natural obligation lying on Children to provide for their Parents in necessity, by any way they are able. 2. The probability of better Education under more able Persons; and therefore the Thebans had a Law, That Parents in case of poverty, were to bring their Children to the Magistrate, as soon as they were Born, who put them out to such as were judged fit to bring them up, and to have their service for their reward. *Alian. v. hist. l. 2. c. 7.*

But however, you say, This place implies a toleration of having many Wives, because it is said, if he take him another Wife, v. 10. I do not deny, that the Mosaical Law did suppose the practice of Poly-

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Polygamy ; but as it doth nowhere expressly allow it, neither doth it expressly condemn it. And although we say, the *Christian Law* is far more excellent, which reduceth Marriage to its first institution ; yet you will find it a hard Matter to prove such a permission of *Polygamy* as this was , to be so repugnant to the *Law* and Principles of *Nature* , as from thence to infer, that this *Law* of *Moses* could not be from *God* : You might have said the same about the Matter of *Divorce* , which was permitted them ; *Christ* saith , for the hardness of their hearts : Which shews, that *God* doth not always require that from Men which is best pleasing to himself ; and that as to his *Political Government* , he may not always punish that, which is not so pleasing to him. The

The next Law you quarrel at is that, *Deut. 22. 13, &c. About the tryal of Virginitie*: Which you object against, as *immodest, and uncertain, and therefore unbecoming the Wisdom of God*. So, many customs of those elder times of the World, and of the *Eastern* parts to this day seem very strange to us, that are not so well acquainted with the *Reasons* of them. Methinks, it better becomes our *Modesty* in such cases, to question our understanding those customs, than presently to cast so much disparagement on the Author of them. If you had been offended at the literal sense of those Words, many of the *Jews* themselves say, they are to be understood figuratively of the evidence that was to be brought and laid open before

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before the *Judges*, on behalf of
the defamed Person. And both
Josephus and *Philo* omit the laying
open the Cloth. But supposing
it to be taken in the plainest lite-
ral sense, I have Two Things to
say in vindication of this Law.

1. That however uncertain some
Physitians have thought that way
of *Tryal* to have been in these
parts of the World; yet it is ge-
nerally agreed to have held for
the *Eastern* parts, by the most
skilful *Physitians* among the *Ara-
bians*: And a custom of the same
nature is said by good Authors
to have been observed among
the *Egyptians*, and other *Africans*,
as well as the *Arabians*; so that
this could not be thought so
strange or immodest among the
Inhabitants of those parts: And
it is very probable that some
par-

particulars, as to the Practice of these *Laws* are not set down, which might very much tend to the certainty of them, as the Age of the Married Persons, which was most likely then, as it is to this day in the *Eastern* parts, very early, the *Jews* say, at 12 years old, which would make the Tryal more certain. 2. As to the Modesty of it, you are to consider, that the *Law* was intended to keep persons from unjust *defamations*, and such a way of Tryal was therefore pitched upon to deter persons from such *defamations*; which Men might otherwise have been more ready to, because of the *liberty* of *divorce*, and the advantage they had in saving the *dower*, if they could prove the party vitiated before Marriage; therefore all the proof

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of that Nature was to be passed soon after the consummation of Marriage, which being agreed then by all the Friends, there was to be no liberty left for defamation afterwards; but in case any Man should be guilty of it, the producing those Evidences, which before they were agreed upon, should be sufficient to clear the Innocency of the party accused. And therefore I look on this *Law*, as the *Jews* do on that of the *rebellious son*, of which they say, that there is no instance of the practice of it; the Penalty threatned being so effectual to prevent the occasion of it.

And such in a great Measure, I suppose the other *Law* mentioned by you to have been, *viz.* of the *Water of Jealousy*, which you make so strange a matter of;
and

and think it savours too much of a design to gratify the jealous humour of the Jewish Nation: But you might have put a fairer construction upon it, viz. That it was intended to prevent any occasion of suspicion being given to the Husband, by too much familiarity with other persons; since the Law allowed so severe a Trial, in Case the Wife after admonition did not forbear such suspected familiarity, but if you had looked on the Law, as it is, Num. 5. 12, 13. &c. you would have found, that the design of it was to keep Women from committing *secret Adultery*, by so severe a Penalty; yet withall allowing so much to a reasonable suspicion, (for so the Jews understand it, with many Cautions and Limitations) that rather

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then Married persons should live under perpetual jealousies, he appointed this extraordinary way of Tryal, whereby Adultery was most severely punished, and the honour of Innocency publickly vindicated; which certainly are not ends at all unbecoming due Conceptions of God.

The last of the *Jewish Laws*, which you quarrel with is the prohibition of *Usury*, in several places of *Moses his Law* and the *Psalms*: And from hence you fall into a long Discourse to prove the lawfulness of *Usury*: But to what purpose I beseech you? For you were to prove, that *God* could never forbid it; you might have spared your pity for Men, as you think, Blinded with superstition, and cheated with New and Aëry Notions: For by all that I can see by these Papers,

Papers, some pretended Enemies to *superstition* have no better Eyes than their Neighbours, and are as easily cheated with groundless Fancies and Aëry imaginations. The only thing to the business in that long Discourse is this, That you cannot imagine that God should make a Law so much to Mans inconvenience, and forbid him so nice and indifferent a thing, as Moderate increase of profit by letting out of Money, when it is allowed upon Lands, Houses, and Trade, &c. To this I Answer, that the prohibition of Usury, to the Jewish Nation, was upon political Grounds peculiar to the constitution of that People; as appears by the words of the Law, Deut. 23. 19, 20. Thou shalt not lend to Usury unto thy Brother ---- Unto a Stranger thou maist lend upon Usury; but none

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none of the *Laws* which are founded upon common and Moral Reasons have such Limitations as this; for God would never have said, *Thou shalt not commit Adultery with thy Brothers Wife*; but *with the Wife of a Stranger thou maist*. But there was this particular Reason, for the prohibition of *Usury* to the *Jewish Nation*: It pleased God to fix their Habitation, not upon the Sea-side, as *Tyre* and *Sidon* stood; but within Land where they had no conveniencies of Trading, but
 × the Riches of the Nation lay in *Agriculture* and *Pasturage*: In which the Returns of Money are neither so quick nor so advantageous to make sufficient compensation for the Interest of the Money in the time they have it: For the main thing valuable in Money is the

the advantage the borrower makes of it; and where that is great, it seems reasonable that the person whose the Money is, should have a proportionable share of the advantage made by it; but where persons borrow only for present occasions to supply their necessities, there it is only an Act of kindness to lend, and it would be unreasonable to press upon, or take advantage by anothers necessities. And this seems to have been the case among the *Jews*; they were only the Poor that wanted Money for present necessities; the Rich had no way to imploy it in Trading, unless that they lent to the *Tyrian Merchants*, which it was lawful by their Law to do; now if they took *Usury* of their own people, it must be of those whose urgent necessity, and not hopes of a mighty

Objections against the Authority mighty increase by it made them borrow, and therefore it was a very just and reasonable *Law* to forbid *Usury* among them: which I believe he would never have done, if he had placed the *Jews* upon the Coasts of *Phœnicia*, where Trading was so much in request.

These are all the *Laws* which you have picked out of the whole Body of the *Jewish Law*, to represent it unbecoming the *Wisdom of God*: And now I pray Sir, look back again upon them, see how few, how small, how weak your Objections are; and compare them with the weight, and justice, and prudence, and piety, expressed in all the rest, and I hope you will find cause to be ashamed of speaking so harshly of those *Laws*, so well
acco-

accommodated to those Ages of the World, and the Condition of that People for whom they were appointed.

2. I now consider what you object against the story of the Bible.

1. That passage of Moses, Exod. 32. 32. Blot me out of thy Book which thou hast written: Where your design is to shew that Moses prayed to be Damned, and that this was a very irrational thing: And savouring more of passion than of the Spirit of God. But what if Moses meant no such thing as Damnation? As there is not any word in the Context relating that ways, but all the design of that Chapter is about a Temporal punishment, which was a present Destruction of the People for their sins. And the Book out of which he prayed
God

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God to blot him, seems to me to be no other, than the Roll of Gods chosen people, who were to possess the Land of Canaan: For so רֹחַ properly signifies a Roll or Register. Psalm 69. 28. We meet with סֵפֶר חַיִּים the Roll of the living, or the Book of the living we render it, because all ancient Books were in the fashion of Rolls. In that Chapter, Moses intercedes with God on behalf of the People, that he would make good his promise to them, of bringing them into the Land of Canaan. v. 13. and v. 30. He goes up to make an Atonement for the People, i. e. as to the cutting them off in the Wilderness, and therefore he desires rather than the People should be destroy'd, that God would strike him out of the Roll, that he might Dye in the

the *Wilderness* rather than the *People* :
And God gives that Answer to
this purpose , v. 33. *Whoever*
hath sinned against me , will I blot out
of my Book , the sense of which is
the same with those words of the
Psalmist , he sware in his wrath that
they should not enter into his Rest.
Psal. 95, 11. And according to
this interpretation, which is most
natural and easie , all your long
Discourse against praying to be Dam-
ned comes to just nothing ; there
being no pretence for it , either
in the Text or Context.

2. The story of *Ruth* doth not
please you , as favouring in your
opinion of a great deal of *Immodesty* ;
but you would have a better opi-
nion of it , if you consider that
the reason of her carriage to-
wards *Boaz* , in such a manner ,
was upon *Naomies* telling her that
he

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he was one to whom the right of redemption did belong, and by consequence, by their Law, was to Marry her. Ruth 2. 20. And this Ruth pleaded to Boaz, Ruth 3. 9. By which it appears, that she verily believed that he was legally her Husband; and Boaz we see speaks of her as one that was a vertuous Woman, and known to be such in the whole City. v. 11. And he confesses he was her near kinsman, only he saith, there was one nearer. v. 12. By which it seems, if there had not, Boaz had made no Scruple of the matter: And the Jews say, in such Marriages very little Ceremony was required, if the next of kin did not renounce his right, because the Law had determined the Marriage before hand. If you had but considered this one thing,

thing, you would have spared the many *Observations* you make on this story.

3. You Object against 2 Sam. 12. 8. as too much countenancing either *Incest* or *Adultery*, because it is said, that God gave to David his Masters Wives into his Bosom. But 1. It is very strange to bring this place as a countenance to *Adultery*, which was purposely designed to upbraid David with the sin of *Adultery*; and you will find it no easie matter, by the constitution of the *Mosaical Law*, to prove *Polygamy* to be *Adultery*. 2. The *Jews* give a fair Interpretation of this place, for they say, that the *Wife* of a *King* could never Marry after her Husbands decease, as the *Gemara* on the Title *Sanhedrim* expressly saith, although some among them

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 them follow the opinion of R.
Jehuda, that she might Marry
 the succeeding *King*; but that
 is built chiefly on this place; of
 which the rest give a better ac-
 count, viz. that אִשְׁתֵּי doth not
 imply *Sauls Wives*, but the *Maids*
of Honour, or *Attendants*, on the
 Court of *Saul*, which all fell into
Dauids power, and out of whom
 he might choose *Wives*, without
 danger of *Incest*; and even some
 of those who assert it lawful for
 one *King* to Marry his predeces-
 sors *Wife*, yet say in this case of
David, that the Word only im-
 plies, that they were of *Saul's*
Family, as *Merab* and *Michal* were,
 but not *Saul's Wives*. So that all
 the difficulty here arises only
 from the Interpretation of an
 unusual word, in which we have
 much more reason to trust
 the

Selden. *uxor*
Ebra. 1.1.c.10.
Schick. De jure
Reg. c. 16.
Theor. 19.

the Jews than other Writers.

4. You are much offended at *Hosea's Marrying an Adulteress*: But all the formidable difficulties of that place will presently vanish, if you allow the *Prophetical Schemes*, wherein those things are said to be done, which are intended only to represent in a more lively manner the things signified by them. And so you may see the *Chaldee Paraphrase*, fully explains this place of *Hosea* and *Maimonides* purposely discourseth on the *Prophetick parables*, and brings this as one of the instances of them; and with him the rest of the *Jewish Interpreters* agree. But you Object against such a way of Teaching, as tending to the encouragement of *Vice*, which it is very far from, being designed to represent the odiousness of it:

*Maim. More
Nevoch. l. 2.
c. 46.*

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For

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For the whole Scope of the *Prophet* is to let the People understand, that their *Idolatry* was as hateful to *God* as the sin of *Adultery*, and that the consequence of it would be their Misery and Ruine. And yet that *God* expressed as much tenderness to them, as a Man that was very fond of a Woman would do, in being unwilling to put her away, although he knew she were false to his Bed: the former is intended in the first *Chapter*, and the latter in the third. And what is there tending to Immorality in all this? May not *God* make use of one Vice, whose evil is more notorious to represent another by, whose evil they are more hardly convinced of? May not he set forth a *Degenerate People* by the Sons of an *Adulteress*? And by the Names given

given to them express his detestation of their wickedness? Especially when the *Parabolical Terms* are so clearly explained, as they are in the second Chapter.

But you will say, *these things are related as plain matters of Fact: with the several circumstances belonging to them.* It is true, they are so, but so Parables use to be; so was *Nathan's* to *David*; so is that of the *Rich Man* and *Lazarus* in the *New Testament*; so is *Jeremies* going to *Euphrates* to hide his *Girdle*; (for it is not very likely the *Prophet* should be sent 18 or 20 days Journey into an *Enemies Country* for no other end:) So is *Ezekiels* lying on one side for 390 days, and shaving his *Head* and *Beard* contrary to the *Law*, as *Maimonides* observes: And his

Jer. 13. 4, 5.

Ezek. 4. 5, 6.

Ezek. 5. 1.

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digging in the Walls of the Temple at
Hierusalem, while he was in
Babylon: And many other things
of a like nature, which are set
forth with as punctual a Narra-
tion of circumstances as this of
Hosea, and yet they were only
figurative expressions. We that
are accustomed to another way of
Learning, think these things
strange; but this was a very com-
mon way in the elder times, and
it is to this day much used in the
Eastern Countries, to represent
Duties to some, under the Parables
of things as really done by others:
As may be seen in Locman and
Perzoes, besides what Clemens
Alexandrinus and others have said,
concerning the Antiquity and com-
mon use of this Parabolical way of
Teaching.

I now come to your Objections
 ons

ons against the *New Testament* : but I find them so few , and those so slight and inconsiderable , as to the end for which you produce them , that I may easily pass them over. To that *about the continuance of Miracles* , I have already Answer'd : And I find not one word in the places mentioned by you , which implies the necessity of the continuance of them in all Ages of the *Christian Church*. That place , *Mark 10. 29, 30.* speaks of no more but such a *recompence* in this life *as is consistent with persecution* ; and therefore must chiefly lie in inward contentment ; which all wise Men have valued above external accommodations ; although withall , by the account *St. Paul* gives of himself , and his Brethren,

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thren, God did abundantly provide for them one way or other.

2 Cor. 6. 10.

As having nothing, and yet enjoying all things: Which amounts to a Hundred-fold in this life.

But certainly you are the first Man, Who have Objected the obscurity of the Book of Revelations, against the Authority of the Scriptures: Which is just as if one should Object the quadrature of the Circle against Mathematical certainty. If we grant that there are some things in that Mystical Book, we do not yet well understand; what then! Must neither that Book, nor any other of the Bible be of Divine Revelation? I will not pursue the unreasonableness of this way of arguing so far as I might; but I leave yourself to consider of it; and of all

all that I have Written , in
order to your *satisfaction*. If
you think fit to return an An-
swer , I pray do it clearly and
shortly , and with that freedom
from Passion , which becomes
so weighty a Matter : And
I beseech God to give you a
right understanding in all
things. I am

June 11.
1675.

Sir ,

Your Faithful Servant.

F I N I S.
